



# The concept of “Greater Eurasia”: The Russian “turn to the East” and its consequences for the European Union from the geopolitical angle of analysis

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## Abstract

This article examines the Russian project of Greater Eurasia, the reasons for launching such an initiative, and its possible influence on the current regional and global trends in the field of geopolitics, security policy, and relations between Russia and the European Union. The article argues that Greater Eurasia, as a developing geo-economic and geostrategic community, opens up opportunities for Russia and the European project to reset their relationship by creating new zones of mutual development.

## Keywords

EU-Russia relations, geopolitics, Greater Eurasia, international community, security

## Introduction

Today, the global trend of destabilization of the world economy and global politics is at an all-time high. An essential aspect of this trend is the loss of priority of the economy to confrontational politics in the dialogue between Russia and the European Union (EU). The current situation is extremely negative: more and more often, both entities (Russia and the EU) are situated outside the cooperation paradigm. Since the beginning of the international diplomatic, military, and political crisis surrounding Ukraine, the EU's and Russia's, respectively, entrenched positions have led to a deadlock.

In a situation where the dialogue with the West was interrupted, and the EU no longer considered Russia as a strategic partner, the Russian political elite accentuated the project of the “Greater Eurasian Partnership.” The main idea is the creation by Russia of the new Asian policy and the formation of a typical Eurasian political, economic, and security space on the platform of civilization cooperation (Lukin & Yakunin, 2019). According to this project, the Russian government positions its country as a vast, strong, northern Eurasian state and an autonomous Eurasian power

pole in a multicentered world, possessing a unique geopolitical orientation—European and Asian.

The conflict between Russia and the West has narrowed Russia's possibilities for economic maneuver. These possibilities were slight at that time: political disputes about Europeanism's essence have always burdened Russia's dialogue with Europe on economic problems. There was no shared vision of who has more rights to be indeed called Europe: Russia, with its vast territory which geographically accounts for about 35% of the European continent (from Atlantic to Ural Mountains) or Europe itself (20.66% of the territory of Russia)? Western Europe also added to this

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dispute, where the “Western model” promoters claim that its political culture is different from Russia.

In Asia, Russia is free from the burden of such kind of discussions: there it can efficiently act on its own, for example, to build relationships with China, the countries of Central Asia, India, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Korea, under no circumstances claiming to be exclusively part of Europe except for its civilizational political self-perception (identity).

Key research questions are as follows:

*RQ1.* Does the concept of “Greater Eurasia” increase Russia’s geopolitical separation from the EU and the EU from Asia?

*RQ2.* Does it also add to the growth of rivalry between them?

*RQ3.* Can it optimize relations between the EU and the Russian Federation and strengthen the Russian national economy and politics at the same time?

*RQ4.* How can this affect the system of international relations and the environment of macro-regional security?

It should be pointed out that this work is an attempt at comprehensive geopolitical transformation study in the Greater Eurasia region. It is aimed to define the trajectories of those transformations and their sustainability.

## Methodology

The common methodological platform for the research is Geopolitics (Kristof, 1960). There are two complementary processes when applying the method of geopolitics: geopolitics as a *method* of academic analysis to deliver the proper diagnosis and understand a crisis according to the spatial and historical angle and identification of quite the opposite geopolitical representations (Cahnman, 1942; Lacoste, 2009) and geopolitics as a strategy (“applied geopolitics”) in space and time to reach some objective like stability, a crisis resolution, or to understand the context of international negotiations (Gallois, 1990; Mackinder, 1904, 1919; Spykman, 1938, 1939; Tsymbursky, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c) Both these interpretations of geopolitics will be applied in this article. While considering geopolitical representations and strategies, the following question always arises: how does an actor (like a nation) perceive itself through geography and history? Geopolitical visions, projects, and strategies of nations are often a mixture of reality (like the geographical position) and more subjective perceptions (like the perception of its own geographical space and history interpretation). The “geopolitical representations” of actors are an integrated part of the analysis. These representations can be put on a map. Thus,

they participate in the actors’ strategies, for example, facing a crisis or being willing to reach some objective, as an implicit or explicit model of reference. The notion of “Greater Eurasia,” or “Europe from Lisbonne to Vladivostok,” are geopolitical representations forming the basis of geopolitical visions and strategies. Also, these geopolitical visions have to confront reality to evaluate their feasibility. If a geopolitical strategy is considered a necessary scenario, various obstacles have to be highlighted as well, and different kinds of adaptations of the plans following them can be proposed.

The use of geopolitical and thematic maps to understand particular political situations or crises is also significant, which is why, in most cases, cartography is a central tool for analysis. It is because factors determining a situation can be spatially represented on a map, but the described actors’ territorial strategies can be represented as well.

Several methodological approaches can be combined on the geopolitics platform, such as B. Buzan and O. Wæver (2003) on regional security characteristics and various realistic methods of international relations (Emmel et al., 2018). Having constructed this research’s optimal methodology, it makes it possible to examine the main issue as space where various political actions overlap, intersect, co-exist, and confront.

Moreover, the authors applied a principle of historical institutionalism, where institutions are regarded as the set of rules and governmental actions being influenced by the existing political actors such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), EU, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Streek & Thelen, 2005).

## How did this geopolitical vision appear first? The genesis of the idea—EU neighborhood policy

The EU initiated the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in the countries situated in its southern and eastern geographical proximity, immediately after the EU expansion of 2004–2007. It contained the idea of the so-called “Europe of concentric circles” (Gstöhl & Schunz, 2018). This idea, which originated in the 1990s, was an answer to how to structure relations with those EU neighbors whose entry into the Union is temporary or impossible. It was assumed that the decisive criterion for the participation of a country, be it the Maghreb states, the Middle East, or Eastern Europe, would be the quality of their relations with the “core”—the EU. However, of course, there is a big difference between countries that can claim to be European (Eastern Europe) and those that cannot (Maghreb, Mashrek, and the Middle East). Such relations did not assume even hypothetical equality and should have become purely vertical and based on the periphery’s normative subordination concerning the center.

Based on this policy, the central geopolitical vision as an ideal representation was an “EU-centered Greater Europe” (i.e., a shared space “from Lisbon to Vladivostok”). However, this did not work because it was based on a too ideological principle, like the EU normative ideology (Manners, 2009). Moreover, according to the geopolitical method, it was not elaborated enough, demanding a proper diagnosis according to the territorial angle before constructing a strategy. The ENP turned out to be “completely unsuccessful as a tool to avoid confrontation and direct efforts towards achieving development goals in the area from Marrakesh to Vladivostok” (Bordachev & Pyatachkova, 2018, p. 39). The EU has made several systematic mistakes in building broad communities, the main one being the lack of true democratism in relations with neighbors. Errors are dictated by the history and nature of European colonial powers’ relations with the surrounding world (Kuus, 2007).

The EU also worked more and more in synergy with NATO. NATO enlargement preceded EU enlargement. It reinforced the Russian perception that the EU and NATO were working together to push the Euro-Atlantic space to the East at the detriment of Russian security and economic interest. Continuous enlargement of NATO, various regime changes in the former Soviet Union countries, withdrawal of the United States of *Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty* (AMB treaty), and the continued installation of the American and NATO military infrastructure anti-missile system reinforced the perception of the encirclement of Russia. The Ukraine crisis, 6 years after the Russia-Georgia war and the sanction policy, coupled with an acceleration of the Eastern partnership toward Ukraine, made Russians believe it could never acquire an equal status within an EU/NATO centric Greater Europe. That was mainly a sub-geopolitical element of the Western and unipolar hegemony aimed at reducing Russia’s power and influence. Therefore, Russia considered the new EU partnership in Asia and Eurasia through the prism of the doctrine of export of Western norms and democracy.

Therefore, a new Russian turn to the East and the “Greater Eurasia” geopolitical concept react to Western strategy. “Greater Eurasia” was then elaborated not as a copy of the EU-centric order but in an opposite way. There is a fundamental difference between the ENP and the emerging concept of “Greater Eurasia,” as they are based on entirely different principles. First of all, in “Greater Eurasia,” equal and democratic participation of all interested countries, along with unconditional respect for sovereignty, are primary conditions. No one will hide away from others, and there is no attractive uniting center of integration.

Moreover, no junior partner needs to fulfill some conditions to become a valid member. Second, there is no restriction on the geographical scope of the initiative. “Greater Eurasia” covers East, Southeast, and South Asia, the center

of Eurasia, Russia, and those of the European subcontinent who may wish to join it.

## What is Greater Eurasia?

Greater Eurasia is a geopolitical concept obtaining cultural-geographical and political-economic features. “Greater Eurasia” is a continent-wide geopolitical vision, promoting the political and economic cooperation between states and nations from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific. It is bordered in the East, West, North, and South by the four oceans—the Arctic, Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian.

Geographically, it is possible to single out “Greater Eurasia” from a “Small Eurasia.” The word collocation “Small Eurasia” is not used by politicians. However, this article aims to compare it with the term “Greater Eurasia,” which is widely used in political communication and academic research. The geopolitical vision of a “Small Eurasia” is a more precise and narrower meaning of Greater Eurasia restricted today to the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC). It corresponds to a territory that conventionally coincides with the former Russian empire’s borders and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and today, the modern post-Soviet area. It is characterized by more difficult access to the world’s oceans and seas than other entities like the EU or the United States.

Let us examine the “Greater Eurasia” concept in detail. On the periphery, “Greater Eurasia” is characterized by a network of sea trade routes, which are sure to be the most profitable for transporting goods produced in Asia in the long run because of travel time reduction. The strengthening of the production base in the continent’s center will lead to gradual saturation and land corridors. “Greater Eurasia” is connected with developing two international transport and logistics corridors: “East-West—Russian Trans-Siberian railway” and “North-South.” The main proponents of this project are considered to be India and Iran. China is responsible for “the Silk Road Economic Belt”—the land route connecting China with Europe, a project in the framework of the transport infrastructure initiative called “The Belt and Road Initiative.” Under these circumstances, the opportunity of the rational use of such resource potential as the size of its territory allows optimizing logistics and infrastructure inside Russia and turning it into the most extensive global transportation hub.

From the geopolitical and geo-economical point of view, economically powerful China, military superpower Russia, demographically huge India, and a large group of significant medium-sized countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Korea feel more powerful together in the Greater Eurasia partnership. The uniqueness of the Eurasian space situation is that the international environment that is being formed here excludes the possibility and necessity of the emergence of an undisputed hegemon. Therefore, the mega-regional international community emerging here can

become perfect in terms of democracy and sustainability. The main engines and poles of the sizable Eurasian area's integration are the EAEC and China. In the Russian interpretation, this cooperation can lead to forming a macro-region of Greater Eurasia as a vast space of overlapping interests in the sphere of international economy and politics (Slutskiy, 2018; Tsymbursky, 2007b, pp. 29–43, 2007c, pp. 441–463). Mega-regional trade associations set new standards in trade and thereby influence the development of the game rules in world economic processes, which is vital for Russia. In the Chinese interpretation, Greater Eurasia's cooperation is somewhat more abstract—"community of common destiny"—as an international community based on shared values and existing within wider international society (Hameiri & Jones, 2018). Therefore, these projects' relations are based on better principles than with the rest of the countries. The most critical factor facilitates this: the potential participants have a set of shared standard views on the principles on which interstate communication should be built (Clover, 1999).

Nevertheless, what place is reserved for the EU in Greater Eurasia from the geopolitical vision?

### **Greater Eurasia: Russian and EU position**

The scenario of "Greater Eurasia" results from overcoming present-day obstacles to achieve better cooperation from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It supposes a complementarity between the European idea of a "Greater Europe" or the more widely used representation of a "Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok," or Europe from Atlantic to Pacific "with the Russian Greater Eurasia" (de Grossouvre, 2004). With the idea of a "Greater Eurasia," from the Russian point of view, "Greater Europe" is becoming a part of Greater Eurasia because "the only plausible way for Russia to go back to Europe today goes through Asia" (Kortunov, 2018).

However, it is illusory to believe that relations between the EU and Russia will resume in the same format that prevailed before the Ukrainian crisis (Trenin, 2019). Russia will never accept being integrated into a Euro-Atlantic entity as a subordinate element. Russia will not abandon its Asian orientation because the emerging geopolitical center of gravity is Eurasia. Russia's pivot to the East (Karaganov, 2016) is here to stay and will hopefully be accompanied by a resetting of relations with Western Europe, but only in the case of EU reform and Russia's adaptation to the reformed European project if that is a possibility. The Greater Eurasia partnership or community that Russia is looking for is a shared space for economic, logistic, and information cooperation, peace, and security from Shanghai to Lisbon and from New Delhi to Murmansk (Karaganov, 2016). The pivot to the East is geared toward not only China but also other Asian powers. It is also observed as a balancing act

toward China to work on a "constructive counterbalance to China to make sure it does not become 'too strong' or turn into a potential hegemon scaring its neighbors" (Karaganov, 2016).

Contrary to some alarming narratives in the West, the pivot to the East, according to Russia, is not a disconnection from Western Europe. Russia is a European country, and the EU is a neighbor and an important trade and economic partner (Delcour, 2016). Speculations that Russia seeks to weaken or split the EU are absurd, as long as the EU does not align itself with the Euro-Atlantist objective of imposing a unipolar pole of power and fragmenting the Eurasian continent, and worse, the fragmentation of Russian territory. The security dimension is the most important for Russia as it cannot compete with Asian giants in the economic sphere but has a competitive advantage as a security provider. This function has to be recognized by EU member states because they will equally profit from it.

The central question is whether the geopolitical visions of Greater Eurasia, Small Eurasia (EAEC), and "Greater Europe" can be complementary or will exclude each other if a reformed EU and Russia cannot overcome their rival geopolitical strategies. Suppose the EAEC and the EU cannot find ways of cooperation. In that case, the concept of "Greater Eurasia," especially from the Russian point of view, will be impossible. More likely, it will be limited only to Small Eurasia and, in this case, it is sure to compete with the idea of the EU-centered "Greater Europe" in the geographical space between the two poles, in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. There is also one more variant—"Greater Eurasia" dominated by China.

The former idea of "Greater Europe" before the Ukraine crisis was already different from Russia's point of view, as it refused to align based on EU-centric strategy with the unilateral export of its norms. Although the EU insists on promoting multilateralism, in reality, it has a unipolar and unilateral vision of the world. In contrast, Russia has a multipolar and multilateral vision of the world. As a consequence of these diverse global geopolitical representations, the EU-Russia crisis is supposed to be overcome. At the same time, the EU has to reform its political paradigm to achieve that radically. So far, the EU has been unable to anticipate the evolution of other big powers. With an absence of a sound and realistic geopolitical strategy, the EU is lagging, with an increased risk of marginalization and fragmentation.

The EU's ideological understanding of multilateralism and its opposition to the notion of multipolarity so far constitutes an obstacle to more common representations of global evolutions. In its latest report on EU-Russia political relations, the European Parliament highlighted that

whereas Russia's polycentric vision of the concert of powers contradicts the EU's belief in multilateralism and a rules-based international order; whereas Russia's adherence to and support for the multilateral rules-based order would create the

conditions for closer relations with the EU. (“European parliament Resolution on the state of EU-Russia political relations,” 2019)

According to the EU narrative and vague geopolitical representations, the “concert of powers” is opposed to “multilateralism” and “rules-based order.” It seems that the condition for better relations between the EU and Russia, from the EU point of view, is Russia’s acceptance of the EU’s interpretation of multilateralism.

Russia always supports the building of broad, equitable cooperation across the European continent and creating a common economic space between the EU and the EAEC, with the support of the principle of equal and indivisible security. There should be no discussion about Eurasia in the space from the Atlantic to the South China Sea and what it is not. Such a discussion concerning the concept of Europe poisons relations between Russia and countries to the West of it. That is why the exclusion of Eastern and Western Europe, including those belonging to the EU, is not on the essential Eurasian partners’ agenda. European countries are the most critical source of investment, technological, and trade partners for Russia, China, and other Greater Eurasia countries. The crucial point is that maintaining cooperation with the EU will help Russia balance the Chinese influence in Greater Eurasia cooperation processes. If Russia can manage and use its economic opportunities, if Russia and the EU can overcome their ideological and political gap, and if they can stop confronting each other as in a duel, waiting for their opponent’s political fiasco, then over the future 10–15 years, it might be that Russia will have all the conditions for becoming a major industrial country, in which the EU will be interested no less than in the United States or China.

Due to its position, the EU must simultaneously make many bets. First of all, this concerns the major European powers, especially the continental ones: Germany and France (Kukartseva & Thomann, 2018). The EU is interested in access to the raw materials and human potential of the EAEC and in expanding the market for the promotion of its products. However, it is not easy to take an exact position.

The total unity of the Western community is no longer an axiom, although it is unlikely to see the erosion of the West’s community and its institutions. Most likely, there will be a readjustment of relations within this community.

However, the exclusive Euro-Atlantist vision among EU institutions and most Atlantist governments of EU member states is an obstacle to a deepening of EU-Russian relationships, especially since the Ukraine crisis. It reinforces the geopolitical competition between the idea of the EU- and NATO-centered Greater Europe as a sub-element of the West and the Russian idea of a Greater Eurasia. The geopolitical visions here overlap and compete without any hope of substantial cooperation.

## **Obstacles to Greater Eurasia cooperation**

There are many problems with the Eurasian cooperation agenda. They concern both the substantive content of Eurasian integration, possible formats of cooperation, and the problems of ensuring security and institutions’ development. First, Greater Eurasia states share a significant number of common interests, although views on such fundamental categories as sovereignty and public administration legitimacy vary considerably.

Second, China and Russia need to be especially careful in building their relations in Eurasia and involving other regional players in this cooperation. Germany’s experience as an informal leader of the EU has shown that it is necessary to be extremely attentive to the objectively most potent player’s economic development role when creating macro-regional partnerships. At first, the consequences of the growth of Germany’s economic power were positive. However, under Chancellor Angela Merkel, Germany became the primary beneficiary of the benefits of European integration, which affected other EU countries’ confidence in it and the stability of the entire structure. If the German leadership in its present form continues in the long term, it will lead to partial shedding of the EU. Therefore, the cooperation between Germany and other EU countries over the last 20 years also needs in-depth study.

Third, the most critical problem is the high possibility of conflicts between China and India and India and Pakistan and the clash of their interests about small regional partners. (Owen et al., 2018).

Furthermore, suppose Russia misses the initiative to combine the EAEC with Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) or the SCO, which India entered in 2017. In that case, it will be possible to forget about Greater Eurasia in 10 years. Nevertheless, there will be the emergence of another geopolitical vision, “Greater Chinese Asia.” The place where decisions are made will be China. Beijing, not anybody else, will bring together countries and peoples (Hasegawa, 2018) and establish its own rules of behavior in Greater/Chinese Eurasia.

## **The obstacle to the exclusive Euro-Atlantist geopolitical vision**

The exclusive Euro-Atlantist model was the EU’s favorite scenario in the dominant representations until Donald Trump’s election in 2016. However, the questions related to the very critical statements of Donald Trump vis-à-vis the EU and NATO have introduced a great deal of uncertainty. He did not seem to subscribe to the same exclusive Euro-Atlantist vision as the Europeans do. It raises the following question: is the Euro-Atlantist scenario out of date? The elected American president, Joe Biden, promised to improve relations with its European allies and support the

NATO alliance. EU member states are certainly expecting to repair the transatlantic alliance. However, it is an illusion to think they can come back to the situation *ex ante*, which existed before Donald Trump's election. The main parameter of foreign policy planning and the operating context of the EU, the United States, and international organizations was the policy set by President Trump in the space of Atlanticism at large. The EU retaliatory steps are most likely to affect EU-US relations' transformation for years to come. Undoubtedly, at the same time, EU internal political processes, such as the growth of populism and Euroscepticism, and several other factors, including the financial (2008) and migration (2015) crises, also significantly influenced the trajectory of certain events. Biden's coming to power and the EU's attempts to mitigate potential risks are expected to counterbalance the situation. At the same time, the Alliance for Multilateralism, created on 2 April 2019, by the French and German foreign ministry heads, with the purpose to protect and preserve international norms, agreements, and institutions of the EU as a successful liberal project, testifies to the determination of European political elites to create new mechanisms for the independent solution of pressing problems of world politics on their own.

The narrative of the new American administration will put more emphasis on the support of its European allies. However, the long-term geopolitical stance of the United States will not be modified. In the context of great power geopolitical configuration, there may be a juxtaposition of tactical moves, but the objective of "America first" will not be lost. "America first" will be defended under the slogan of the renewed "American leadership" (Biden, 2020). However, the new EU-China deal highlights an EU-US coalition *vis-à-vis* China will be challenging to implement, especially in commerce matters (Erlanger, 2021). France and Germany already expressed apparent concerns about a too-close alliance with the United States to confront China because it would increase possible tensions (Law, 2021).

The whole Euro-Atlantist scenario is part of the geopolitical stance of the United States on a global scale. With a remarkable continuity, the United States has been seeking for more than a century to prevent the emergence of power on the Eurasian continent that could challenge its global preponderance. These efforts have been a geopolitical constant since World War I, but the Wolfowitz Doctrine of 1992 at the end of the Cold War made them a priority on the US agenda.

Paul Wolfowitz pointed out that America's mission in the post-war era would be to ensure that no rival superpower was allowed to emerge in Western Europe, Asia, or the former Soviet Union (Tyler, 1992). The strategic representation of Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997), who had also made Eurasia the primary stake of the US geopolitical posture, has had a specific influence in the American administration (Vaisse, 2016). This goal was explicitly put back on

the table in 2018 by Aaron Wess Mitchell, Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia at the State Department under Donald Trump's chairmanship. He resigned in January 2019, but his short presence in the State Department (2017–2019) shows that this US geopolitical representation crosses two presidencies.

Thus, Aaron Wess Mitchell's geopolitical vision provides a bit more insight into the US long-term strategy, despite the feeling of uncertainty over US doctrine. Here we find the long-term geopolitical objectives of the United States. He pointed out that "in three world wars, two hot and one cold, we helped unify the democratic West to prevent our brutal opponents from dominating Europe and the Rimland west of Eurasia" (U.S. Embassy in Estonia, 2018). Thus, unsurprisingly, Russia and China have been designated as the strategic opponents of the United States. However, the Cold War has been over for over a quarter of a century, as they "challenge US supremacy and leadership in the 21st century.." Here, we consistently find the US objective of controlling Eurasia to prevent a geopolitical rival from emerging again and reducing its world power.

In the short term, this situation is unlikely to change because the US position is a long-term geopolitical posture and has been explicitly mentioned again. However, we cannot rule out a significant crisis that disrupts current paradigms. The United States considers Europe as a "Rimland," a coastal area under its control that blocks an orientation of the EU toward the Eurasian space, and thus toward Russia, but also China by the continental route. Europe is not the only theater of its geopolitical strategy *vis-à-vis* Eurasia, a strategy which consists of enveloping this continent by the East-European and Indo-Pacific fronts.

Therefore, orientation exclusively to the Euro-Atlantist scenario implies that Europeans are to position themselves within limits imposed by the US geopolitical priorities and act together or abstain. In this configuration, the position of Europeans according to their geography seems to be very difficult. From time to time, the whole Euro-Atlantist scenario makes it impossible for Europeans to decide on their destiny because they have not developed their priorities in this sphere. This kind of scenario weakens Europeans because it makes them an object and not a global geopolitics subject.

The main US strategy objective is to slow the emergence of the multicentered world that threatens the post-Cold War era's unipolar legacy. If NATO was one of the vectors to achieve this goal, the decline of its importance after Donald Trump's inauguration does not question this geopolitical reflex. The real test of transatlantic solidarity will also be measured in the course of crises and the amount of those who would act or not within the NATO framework. The former American president supported bilateral relations and the balance of power, including European allies. It was his tactical change, but the strategic vision remained the same. While seeking to preserve American global dominance, and

slowing down the emergence of a multicentered world, there was a kind of an acceptance of asymmetrical multipolarity with the major strategic opponents of the United States, which President Donald Trump outlined.

Nevertheless, the EU was not considered a credible pole of power in Donald Trump's vision. By all means, it is even more doubtful the situation will change under the new American president, despite the emergence of a new narrative. The EU is based on different paradigms, such as multilateralism and its member states being unable to counterbalance the United States according to the balance of power doctrine. Most member states' governments in both the EU and NATO would instead follow ancient principles, contrary to their main ally.

The idea of Euro-Atlantism from the European point of view is to build an equilibrated system with two poles. However, the conditions for a balanced Euro-Atlantist scenario with an American pole and a European pole do not exist. Member states of the EU have become increasingly dependent on the United States, which remains their military arsenal for most member states, vulnerable to their extraterritorial legislation, their control of cyberspace with the Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon (GAFA), financial and commercial ties, and their cultural domination of mass media and ideas with the Euro-Atlantist hegemonic think tanks in Brussels and national capitals. The strong connection with the United States, which has hitherto been at the heart of globalization and these geopolitical flows, has gradually weakened the Westphalian heritage of European nations following their acceptance of varying degrees of the open and multicultural ideology model of society.

The model of liberal democracy of American inspiration and the mass immigration resulting from the open society vision accelerate the civilizational conflicts with radical Islam on the European territory; then, this eliminates the political part of the globalization process. When faced with Trump and "America First," this partnership became more asymmetrical and hierarchical to the EU's detriment. Trump's America seemed to favor a form of multipolarity, but without the EU. Maintaining an exclusive Euro-Atlantist scenario by inertia allows European governments to avoid responsibilities. It is the most straightforward reaction, but it has far-reaching consequences for the future, including Europeans' marginalization in the global geopolitical arena. However, in the longer term, the different geographical position of the United States and the EU is likely to weaken the transatlantic link and maintain the exclusive character of the Euro-Atlantic scenario inexorably. The Euro-Atlantist trajectory contradicts the emergence of a multicentered world. The emergence of new so-called "illiberal" political forces in Europe and the United States also tends to rehabilitate national priorities against globalization's excesses. They are likely to distend the Euro-Atlantic link in favor of more precarious relations and the generalization of more fluid coalitions of volunteers.

From the US point of view, the EU is therefore only a sub-element of its unipolar global strategy focused on Eurasia. From the Russian point of view, the EU is a part of its Greater Eurasia geopolitical vision. However, it is different from the United States because Russia's global vision is a multipolar rather than unipolar world. China also has its geopolitical project globally and Eurasian scale, where Europe is integrated within this global vision. The EU has adopted its Global strategy but refuses to mention polycentrism in it and considers that it has complementarity to NATO, at the same time claiming to reach strategic autonomy. It means the EU considers itself the US's minor partner and a sub-element of a Euro-Atlantic vision. The EU is the only actor that does not have its geopolitical vision. The election of the American president Joe Biden will not fundamentally change these long-term geopolitical postures.

It concludes that the EU has to be reformed; otherwise, further confrontation and EU obsolescence is the most likely scenario. The exclusive Euro-Atlantist vision of the EU is the biggest obstacle to the better positioning of the EU according to its geography and finding common ground with Russian geopolitical strategy.

Such an unfavorable scenario for the margin of maneuver of EU member states makes the alternative perspective more pressing. Although it must be stressed, it is implausible it could be soon implemented or merely longed for because European member states have quite general ideas. It is the negotiation of a new European and Eurasian security architecture.

The election of Joe Biden will surely raise big expectations from EU member states and dilute Europeans' will to act more autonomously and delay various challenging debates on a fundamental reform of the European project. Still, long-term geopolitical trends will undoubtedly change it. After a period of renewed hope for better transatlantic relations, present fundamental questions will remain different geopolitical priorities because of the United States and the EU's geographical position, the weakness and disunity of the European partners making it impossible to build a strong European pillar within the Euro-Atlantic space.

The most likely scenario is the continuation of the status quo with the United States remaining a world power though unable to prevent the current strengthening of multipolarity and EU still mainly remaining close to United States geopolitical priorities, but unable to reach strategic autonomy and to focus mainly on the preservation of its internal market and preventing its fragmentation process. Commercial transatlantic disagreements are sure to extend shortly. The worst possible scenario is an acceleration of global geopolitical rivalries between the United States, China, and Russia, with an increase of regional military confrontations and arms race, leading to the EU marginalization because it will not become any soon (and probably ever) a military power. The less likely scenario is the negotiation of a new European and Eurasian security architecture. However, it may be the only scenario where the EU member states and

Russia can reset their relationship in a reformed European project.

*We have chosen to highlight how this new approach could foster more strategic debate, although there is no political will to implement it. More and more international and internal crises will burst in the fluid and unstable geopolitical world and force all actors to think of alternative scenarios creatively if they want to avoid more confrontations. The worst is never certain, but, in the end, it occurs frequently.*

### **Promotion of a new Eurasian geopolitical architecture to overcome the logic of confrontation**

How could this recent European and Eurasian security architecture change? At this stage, we need to proceed with a geopolitical diagnosis of the global situation before dwelling upon any geopolitical recommendations. The spatial approach is closer to geopolitical reality.

The reformed European project must not be excluded from the group of alliances formed through competitive accommodation. A policy of groups undertaken as a function of one's security, economic, energy, environmental, demographic, and cultural interests is a way of diversifying one's external relations to include every continent. The problem is that entrenched positions between Russia and the EU can be quite comfortable for both sides, as none of the parties need to be engaged in deep reforms. This situation characterizes the present-day conflict between the EU and Russia, leading to a weakening of both former partners toward other powers, notably the United States and China.

It is geopolitical logic that Russia positions itself at the center of the map and determines its geopolitical priorities accordingly, as the United States or China do. Only the EU does not proceed this way, although its member states elaborate their priorities this way. The European project can only reach a critical geopolitical mass with the inclusion of Russia. The West should not be an obstacle to a political Europe. The reformed EU must therefore identify its interests separated from Euro-Atlantic or US interests.

According to its own 2016 principles toward Russia, it is an illusion that the EU can handle each different crisis in the overlapping share of interest between the EU and Russia separately. Only efforts to understand a common global diagnosis and the negotiation of a new pan-Eurasian geopolitical architecture will pave the way for resolving various local and regional crises. It might be complicated in the current situation, but it is the only solution for both Russia and the EU to avoid a situation of permanent crisis and competition.

The unpredictability of the US posture, combined with Donald Trump's new unilateral and innovative approach

under the renewed doctrine of "America first," led EU member states, especially France and Germany, to promote more European strategic autonomy. French President Emmanuel Macron also proposed that the EU think about its relations with Russia in a more independent way and envision a new European security architecture. It might be that the new American president Joe Biden is trying to negotiate with Russia at a bilateral level without considering European interests, especially regarding the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). After the recent American presidential election, the United States and Russia have agreed to extend START for 5 years. However, tough negotiations will occur in the future, whereas the question of China's inclusion is not resolved. If the EU member states do not anticipate them, they will lag behind Russian geopolitical strategy again and America's new intentions. It might end in the EU being a variation of adjustment of US-Russia and US-Chinese relations. EU cannot have a mandate to negotiate about the strategic nuclear issue. Nevertheless, France, the only nuclear power among the member states and a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, could raise the issue.

The negotiation of a new Eurasian security architecture preserving Russia's security interests would facilitate the stabilization of the EU's continental hinterland. It would also be a favorable opportunity for the reformed EU to establish a center of equilibrium alongside Russia, which would constitute a useful counterweight against other global powers.

In this case, Russia and the West constitute one global unity which acts rationally, following the same logic. It is neither lawlessness nor chance that dominate these connections, but mind and order; there is no drama and strain here. Here Russia is an objective element of the global system (Glaser [Kukartseva] & Dzhavad, 2020, p. 26)

The lack of institutionalization can create opportunities for the states to cooperate and even create short-term alliances. There are no issues that can entirely hinder them from solving, for instance, global security problems. More than that, it is worth mentioning the unfolding information warfare between Russia and the West at present.

### **A pan-European broad coalition of the willing**

It is also an illusion to think the 27 member states of the EU will agree on a new European and Eurasian security architecture. To overcome the obstacles, a smaller group of states within the EU and Russia, having reached a critical geopolitical mass, must push the reset button because unanimity will never be achieved within the EU. The constitution of a "Central European Alliance" ought to be decisive

in organizing a critical mass in Europe, including Russia, and avoiding mutual neutralization. It would entail at least the membership of Russia, Germany, and France, whose territories constitute the European continent's central axis (Kukartseva & Thomann, 2018). France guards its autonomy carefully and has a robust strategic tradition. It could assume a leadership role with Germany within the EU to forge a continental European axis. The idea is that Greater Europe from the EU point of view and Greater Eurasia will become complementary. It can only be based on the following:

1. A reformed EU where the member states negotiate a strategy according to their geography, and not as a sub-element of an exclusive Euro-Atlantist vision, where Europe is only a Rimland;
2. Instead of a multilateralist ideology, the doctrine of the balance of power is more likely to achieve trust between the EU member states and Russia to complete joint projects and identify standard norms and common values;
3. A new Eurasian security architecture based on the conditions mentioned earlier would be negotiated to implement this new geopolitical vision based on bilateral relations and synergy between international institutions.

The global geopolitical diagnosis highlights that two major stability zones, amid a world drifting toward instability, conflicts, and growing uncertainty, are the Euro-Atlantic space covered by NATO and the Eurasian area covered by the SCO. On the margins of these two groupings, conflicts and security threats can endanger these "Islands of peace." The danger of terrorism is already more and more present in these two zones. Therefore, it is crucial to contain these fast-growing internal security threats coming from the crisis zones (Thomann, 2020).

There are missing links in the security architecture of the European, Eurasian, and Central Asian spaces that need to be fixed to avoid further fragmentation of the European continent between Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian alliances (Thomann, 2013).

Synergy is needed between the various actors to achieve geopolitical stability on the Eurasian continent. On a long-term basis, a new Eurasian geopolitical architecture based on a new doctrine of international organizations' overlapping circles would be a significant factor for developing and improving Eurasian security.

The Euro-Atlantic scenario of further intrusion by the EU into the former USSR space would be counterproductive: it would lead to friction with Russia.

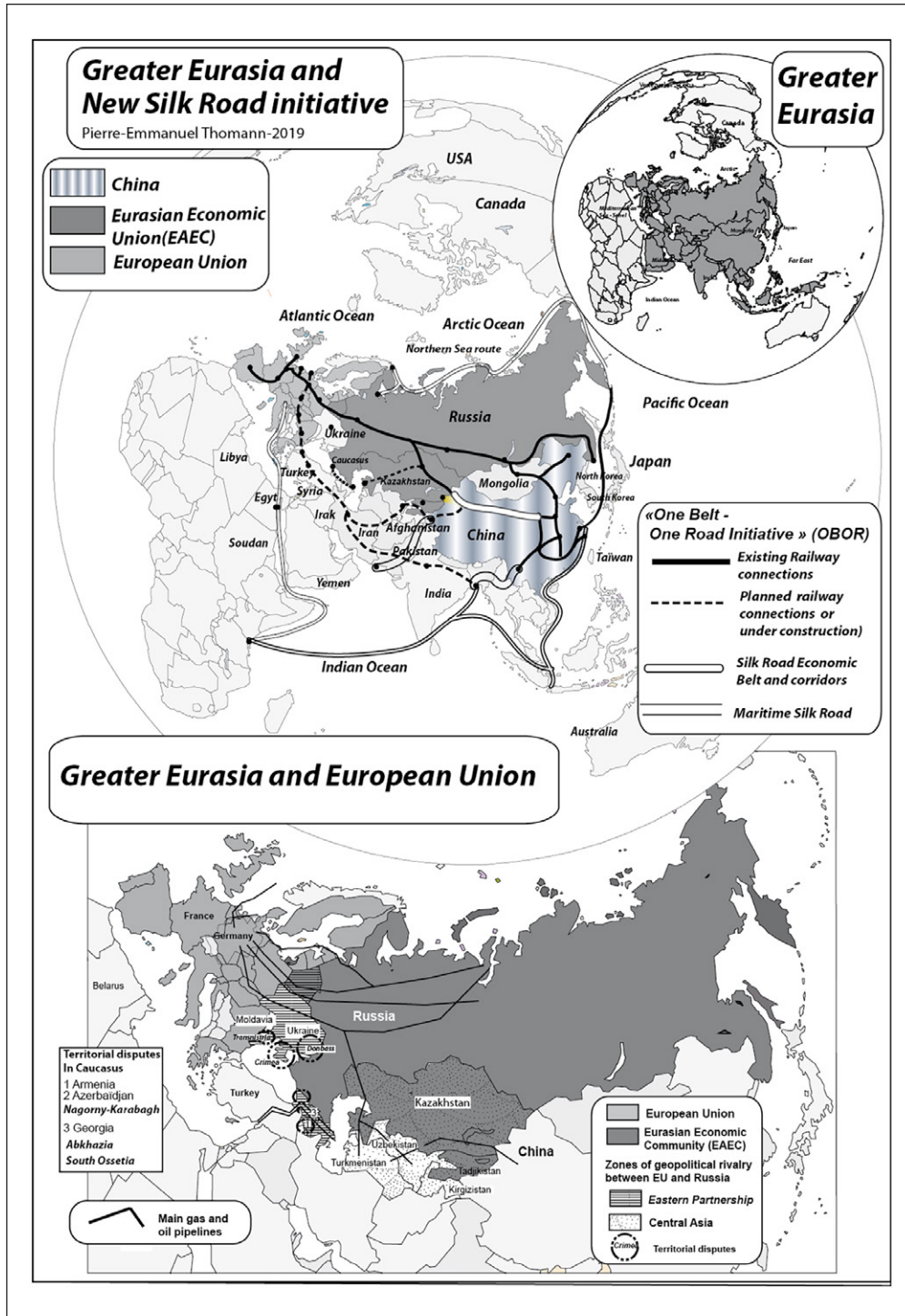
In a multicentric world, the adjustment between competing geopolitical projects and the stabilization of friction between poles of power oscillating between latent rivalry and cooperation will be difficult to achieve other than by

the balance of power principle. It is a prerequisite for a negotiation between poles of power to sustain stability and promote expected values. With the increasing reduction of resources, the principle of geographic tightening around its immediate geopolitical environment is also a response to over-extension, according to a strategy of concentration of actions and economy of means.

The individual EU and NATO member states disagree on further enlargement. It would be impossible for these Euro-Atlantic institutions to manage the geopolitical diversity of the Eurasian continent. This new security architecture is based on the "geographical tightening" principle. Geographical proximity would be a central criterion to building regional alliances to foster stability and prevent any further Eurasian fragmentation. The EU can neither exclusively represent the whole of Europe nor extend itself to the Eurasian continent. This architecture aims to promote synergies between interleaved organizations like NATO, EU, OSCE, Council of Europe, SCO, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), European Economic Union (EEU), and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and stabilize the overlapping security spaces. The UN's role would be crucial to manage this diversity and identify convergence, divergence, competition, and complementarity. It should lead to greater levels of stability.

The negotiation content would recognize respective red lines, take into account respective failures, and retreat from utopian ideas. There is, therefore, an urgent need for each party to identify and understand respective geopolitical representations, which are a mixture of ideals and reality. In a parallel process, common geopolitical interests can be identified.

The most pressing issue is territorial overlap between the EU-centered Greater Europe and the Russia-centered Greater Eurasia. Prudence suggests that the EU's enlargement should not be carried out precipitately, and that of the Atlantic Alliance even less so. A buffer zone including Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova transitioning gradually into a region of cooperation between Russia and the EU is a more realistic option. Renunciation of the EU's enlargement and the Atlantic Alliance into Russia's "near abroad" is the way to increase regional stability and improve relations with Russia. With stable frontiers, the EU would end its dilution, which is growing with successive enlargements. Its internal cohesion and its identity, which are crucial for popular support, would be strengthened. Without calling relations with the United States into question, a rebalancing of the Atlantic Alliance is also necessary to take European interests into account. This new balance would form the basis of a new Eurasian security architecture by taking into account Russia's security interests and by facilitating the stabilization of the continental hinterland of the EU. It would also make it possible for the EU to constitute an area of stability close to Russia.



**Map I.** Greater Eurasia and New Silk Road initiative—Greater Eurasia and European Union.

In this new geopolitical architecture, a new “security space” from *Lisbon to Vladivostok* would be the inner circle of a wider Euro-Atlantic security space from *Vancouver to Vladivostok* but not based on the EU: NATO-centric

perspective as it was the case before the Ukraine crisis when Russia was still considered a strategic partner, but based on a geopolitical balance and reciprocal recognition of each sub-system. In this configuration, we would find

the EU as a pivot/political center and Russia as a neighboring pivot/political center at the crossroads of overlapping security spaces from *Vancouver to Vladivostok* (NATO and OSCE, USA-EU-Russia), *Lisbon to Vladivostok* (UE-Russia), *St. Petersburg to Beijing* (SCO) and *Minsk-Dushanbe* (CSTO and EAEC) (Thomann, 2020, p. 93). This new geopolitical architecture would facilitate a better balance of power, and hopefully, synergy and complementarity between a new Greater Europe from a reformed EU viewpoint, Greater Eurasia from the Russian viewpoint, and Greater Asia from the Chinese viewpoint.

The doctrine of “overlapping circles” supposes international actors’ acceptance of the emergence of various international organizations whose objectives contribute to Eurasian and world stability. The SCO is covering the central part of the Eurasian landmass, and therefore, the organization’s future is crucial to world stability. Central Asia, in particular, plays a crucial role in maintaining stability on the Eurasian landmass: it is also a geopolitical lock to prevent instability in Afghanistan and the Middle East from spreading to the whole of Central Asia, and therefore to Russia and China. It is also of decisive importance for Europe: if there is no peace and stability in the Eastern part of Eurasia, there is no chance of having peace and stability on the Western part because of the growing interdependences in energy, commerce, migration flow, terrorism, and criminal activity.

## Conclusion

Let us outline possible answers to the key questions posed in the article. The stability of supply and demand in the energy market is vital for both unions. However, the idea of creating a common economic space between the EU and the EAEC is still very far from implementation. Several known contradictions do not yet allow the leaders of both integration associations to start discussions at the official level about “integration of integrations.” Russia needs Europe as a responsible and predictable partner in resolving economic and political issues. It is also in the EU’s best interest to become an independent and competent player.

However, while no one has enough political will to overcome the current competition and enough clout for engaging the EU in more fundamental reforms toward more geopolitical thinking and for building its geopolitical vision according to its geography, the concept of “Greater Eurasia” objectively separates Russia politically more and more from the EU, and the EU from Asia. Russia is open to constructive cooperation with all partners, not only those in Europe, which shows a counter interest. Moreover, Russia is ready to cooperate in the volume to which its partners agree. From the West, these volumes are small, and from the countries of “Greater Eurasia,” they are huge. Therefore, any event, such as the September 2018 strategic command post exercises “East-2018,” which, according to the

military, became the largest in Russia since 1981, and in which the military units of China and Mongolia also took part, does not optimize the environment of macro-regional security.

Even though Moscow is always ready for the broadest possible cooperation, a sober calculation shows that one cannot expect to improve relations with the West in the near future. The EU is unlikely to exist without Asia, but Russia is also part of Asia, so the EU cannot ignore the project of “Greater Eurasia” (Lukin & Yakunin, 2019). More than that, it cannot ignore the ways and belts of Eurasia. National and international development projects in the Eurasian space in this case should have clear prospects for their conjugation.

According to the lessons to be drawn, the European project will have to be reformed, particularly regarding the thematic of external relations. This objective seems to be shared tentatively by the German and French governments. French President Emmanuel Macron announced a new European security architecture goal, while the German government’s coalition treaty stated “Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok” as an economic objective. The conditions were laid down for the German and French governments to advance on this path, the prerequisite for strategic autonomy for the EU in terms of defense and security, and the implementation of the Minsk agreements by Russia. At the same time, Ukraine is mainly responsible for the blockage; however, it is unrealistic and constitutes obstacles.

However, there is no way a complementarity and a new balance of power can be found between a new Greater Europe and a Greater Eurasia without EU reform. We can also anticipate that if the EU does not reform itself, it will be side-lined; it will disintegrate, leading to a messy situation. The biggest challenge for the European project to accept is to find a place for Russia and Russia to position themselves according to this reformed European project. Greater Eurasia and Greater Europe have to work in synergy to balance the most potent geopolitical projects from both sides of Eurasia, the greater West, based on “American First” on one side, and the Greater Asia on China’s Silk Road project. It would avoid positioning both the EU and Russia as the junior partners of these rival geopolitical projects. The EU is only a sub-element of the Greater West and Russia, a sub-element of Greater Asia.

Ultimately, the EU-Russia crisis and the new Russian geopolitical vision of Greater Eurasia make it even more urgent for the EU to move out of its strategic lethargy. The European project might not survive, not only if it does not reform but also if it does not include Russia in its new form, in the new polycentric world. The European project, therefore, has to make its pivot to the East. It means clarifying its position toward both Russia and China. If not, individual member states will do it individually, as we can already observe (especially toward the Chinese One Belt One Road [OBOR] project) and remain the junior partner of all

combinations. The political context makes the potential implementation of these ideas today very unlikely. However, in the longer run, in about a decade of fruitless confrontation, the European states and the United States might realize that their geopolitical vision is obsolete and finally accept the implementation of a recent concert of powers in the emerging multicentric world.

Russia is in a better position; Europe will not get away from it, but at the same time, it will strengthen the Russian position in Eurasia. However, risks have increased as well. Russia could gain so much influence that these risks inevitably result in an attempt to weaken its capacities. Here, the security dilemma has already occurred in Russia's external policy: achieving a goal, taking a good niche on the global stage, has resulted in threats to its national security. However, weakening or loss of the achieved position is an even more significant threat. Based on the balance of power between states and the netting of international organizations in Greater Eurasia, a new European security architecture might be one way to overcome the risk of further tension.

It is necessary to launch the geopolitical debate with the EU citizens so that it is not confined to the political, diplomatic, and military levels but could serve as an incentive to advance "political Europe." It would avoid opposing geopolitical questions and public opinion. Filling the geopolitical void would help to remedy the democratic deficit by giving a sense of direction to the construction of Europe.

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